

GRAF BOSSI-FEDRIGOTTI

*Kaiseryäger am
Col di Lana*



FRANZ SCHNEIDER VERLAG



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The Tyrolean Kaiserjager on Col di Lana



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Detachment, to the front!

Above the snow-covered mountain giants and valleys of the Dolomites lies the whole mysterious magic of a moonlit night. The peaks and ridges of the Dome of the Rocks with their wild and jagged shapes stretch out ghostly into the star-studded night sky. The wide alpine pastures and dark wooded hilltops below appear broad and massive, serving as a foundation for the steeply rising stone steps. Pale moonlight plays over the slopes of these alpine pastures and valley walls, illuminating a strange and silent life that takes place from the heights of the mountains to the valleys and again from the valleys to the ridges. There are paths and roads all along the walls of the valleys, surrounded by masses of snow several metres high, running in countless meanders along the slopes. Dark columns of marching Austrian soldiers, wrapped in coats and furs, march along them. The Norwegian ski caps resembling field caps of the Austrian infantry have been folded down over their

ears; some wear white snow coats with hoods, others have blankets or sacks thrown over their heads. It is a strangely hooded group that incessantly meets, stops, gives way and then marches on again in silence. Between the infantry columns, again long trains of small, shaggy pack animals patter and clatter, restlessly snorting and snorting under the heavy loads they have to carry on their highly packed pack saddles. Other columns of such pack animals come down from the mountains with empty saddles and quietly clattering cooking boxes and pack baskets with their guides, towards the mountain marchers. At the passing points the columns pile up for a short time, soft shouts are heard, here and there one of the animals shuns, lashes out and stops for a short moment with trembling nostrils and a head held high by the hand of the guide, until the upward moving sections have cleared the way again and pass the restless animal almost silently...

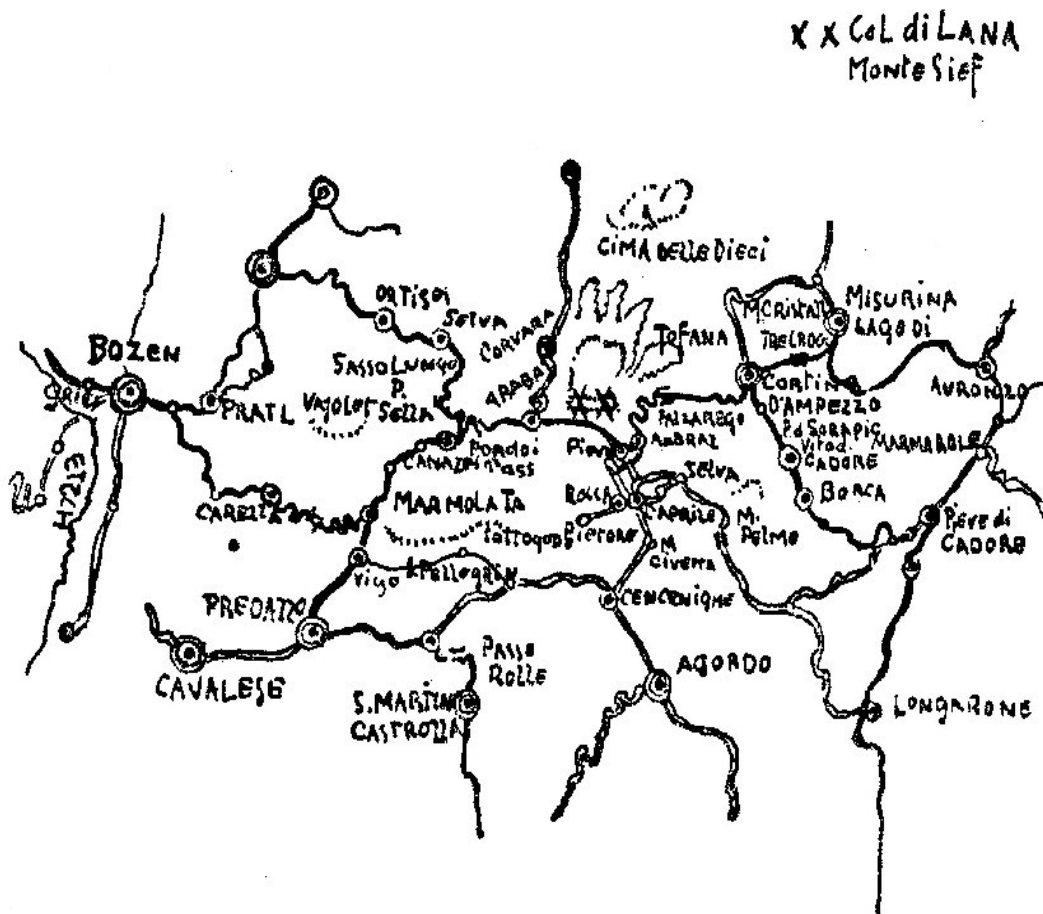
In the midst of these mountain marching columns - a company of "Tyrolean Kaiserjager" climbed up to the heights. Silently and introverted, the hunters stomp along. Their night march today is towards the most fought over mountain of the Tyrolean Alpine front, the Col di Lana. There, where behind the snowy slopes of the Campolungo Pass a muffled roll and roar betrays the actual battle front, they will today replace other Kaiserjager of the same regiment, who for eight days at an altitude of almost two thousand metres between ice, snow, avalanches and bitterly cold winter storms have withstood the incessant attacks of the Italians. They are real Tyrolean mountain troops, these Tyrolean emperor hunters, who work their way forwards along the meter-high snow walls between the passing pack animals and marching columns. When the moonlight hits their faces for a moment, it illuminates many a weather-hardened fighter's face, in whose features not only

the nature of the Tyrolean countryside has drawn the runes of the heavy mountain farming work, but the moonlight also plays on features whose hardness has been shaped by a year and a half of campaigning in Poland, Galicia, the Carpathians and finally in the home mountains of Tyrol. The Tyrolean Kaiserjager were the most glorious regiments of the Austrian army. They were far superior in bravery and fighting spirit to the regiments of the Habsburg Monarchy, which were made up of Croats, Czechs, Poles, Ruthenians, Romanians, Slovaks and Slovenes, Italians and Serbs. No wonder, then, that it was precisely the sons of the Hoferland, the Tyroleans, who, as the most loyal of the faithful, were always deployed at the front where the danger was greatest and the reliability of the German-Austrian fighters was tested the hardest. In the countless fighters against the Russians, in Galicia, in the Carpathians and in Poland, the Tyrolean Imperial Fighters had added new honour to their old reputation, which had often been proven from previous wars. Since they had been called upon to defend their closest homeland, Tyrol, against the Italians, they and their other Tyrolean comrades-in-arms, the Kaiserschützen and Standschützen, had become tireless guards of their highest but also most beautiful mountains, the Dolomites.

The Kaiserjager-Company works its way up the mountainside. The path has become narrower here, so that the hunters can only trudge forward one after the other. The remaining columns and also trains of the small shaggy pack horses have been left behind at a lower-lying cable car station, from where some of the war material has to be transported up impassable gorges to different altitudes. From the mountain now only a single chain of soldiers striding one after the other comes down to the valley. Now and then the two marching columns

exchange short words with each other. But the phrases that those passing by each other have to say to each other do not want to go beyond a brief question and answer, beyond a half-loud shout. They are Czech soldiers coming down from the mountain, artillerymen who have brought ammunition to one of the positions to which no cable car leads and are now returning to the valley. But because these artillerymen are Austrian soldiers who do not understand German, the Kaiserjager are not in the mood to have a long conversation with them and ask them how things are going up there.

"Up there" is the dreaded mountain, the Col di Lana, which has been drinking the blood of thousands for almost a year now. Which the Italians, while the Bavarians and Tyroleans were still occupying the top of the mountain in the summer of 1915, had already attacked ten times.



In October 1915, these attacks had intensified and in that single month the Italian stormed the mountain seventeen times, each time with 25-30 battalions. But again and again his waves of attack were shattered by the bravery of the defenders. The mountain had drunk so much blood that it had been given the name "mountain of blood" in the soldiers' mouths and the enemy had called it "Calvary Mountain". Then winter had come, but with the snow covering the rocks and access paths of the Col di Lana, the enemy's attacking spirit and the German-Austrians' tenacious defensive will had not been diminished. While the flakes were playing and the whole splendid Dolomite world all around was transformed into a glittering fairy-tale world as far as the ice fields of the Marmolata and the Grail Castle of the Sella Group, while avalanches thundered in the abysses and on the rocky slopes, while snowstorms raged and a cold spell set in, often forcing the soldiers to hold out at their posts at forty degrees below zero, the war continued relentlessly in the heights. Where the rock froze, the defenders barricaded themselves between ice walls and snow weirs frozen to ice. They built their shelters in snow caves, which they dug out many meters deep. To get from one field guard to the other, they bored tunnels through the snow walls, and because the battle over the snow fields could no longer be fought, as the white surface covered abysses where hundreds of people could lose their lives if they stepped on them, the soldiers built many hundreds of metres of tunnels and underground passages through the snow on both sides of the front, which they used as sally gates to the attacks against the enemy. It was a terrible, a relentless war that raged up there in the mountains in the winter months of 1916, a war that in subtle dreadfulness claimed more victims than any

other war on the plain. For where there were no grenades, no shrapnel, no machine gun bullets, no gunners' fire that caused death, nature did its part to destroy man. The Tyrolean Kaiserjager knew all this, and on this night in April 1916 they took up their positions again. They knew these snowy slopes, which, despite the spring that was about to begin, still lay there so dazzlingly white and peaceful at night, and on which one could walk so silently and as if on a white carpet. All of a sudden a small crack in the snow cover could be seen up there, a few meters above their heads, and a few minutes later the whole snow surface could break down with a thunderous roar. Anyone not buried by the avalanche was dragged down with it. Nevertheless, they loved the mountains, because only those who know the dangers and the uncanny pitfalls of the high mountains know how wonderfully rewarding the mountains are when you have overcome these dangers and can look out from their heights into the silent magical world of their wildly torn glacier domes. That is why they were prepared to defend these mountains to the last man, because these mountains held their home, these mountains were the symbol of the valleys in which they lived and without these mountains there was no more Tyrolean land for them. . .

The One-Year-Old Intellectual Bacher

In the midst of these serious "men," a young one-year-old also carried his highly packed knapsack. Hardly seventy years old when, a few months ago, he had moved away from school to join the 2nd Regiment of the Tyrolean Kaiserjager, he had been dragged into the middle of the war, but these few months of war had already made the boy as tough a fighter as the old men who marched in front and behind him. Nevertheless, he had been given a nickname in the company, because he was a

"G'scherer". G'scherte, that is to say in the Tyrolean country all those who have "g'schduded" (studied) something. But because the order to mobilize and the World War had made no difference between those who had studied and those who had not, young Hans Bacher had to wage war as a "Kaiserjaga" in the midst of mountain guides, lumberjacks, alpine dairymen, farmers and carters. As the son of a Brixen lawyer, Hans was not a mummy's boy, but he was at least "something better" by birth, as they used to call him in Tyrol. And so at first, perhaps unconsciously, he had not given himself as freely and naturally as simple soldiers would expect. It was not that he failed in any way in his duty, or that he had not fulfilled his duty as a soldier, on the contrary, he had already distinguished himself several times before the enemy, only this contact with his comrades, the fact that he was able to live in the simple world of thoughts of these mountain people with their uncomplicated views, that was very difficult for Hans at first. Even his well-intentioned attempts to teach were not well received.

He had reaped mockery, he had been thanked with a grumpy smile. For these simple Kaiserjager, the first commandment was to be a sure shot, the second commandment was to love their homeland and the last commandment was never to be proven, that one would be smarter or wiser than they, the simple sons of the mountains. Thus his origin and his educated appearance among hunters one day had earned him the good-natured nickname "Intelligenzhansl", or "Hans the Intellectual". Someone had called it once and now it had become the winged word of the company, even Lieutenant von Tannhuber, who led the company, and the other officers of the company had adopted this name into their official language.

"Don't step on my foot, Intelligenzhansl!", this name again resounded from the mouth of Bacher's Borderman into the silent stomping of the men. Hans, lost in thought, had probably completely forgotten that even when he was treading snow he had to keep following in the tracks of the man in front of him, and so he had stepped on the heels of Peter Oberhollenzer, who was heavily laden with his rucksack, crampons, climbing ropes, rifle and ammunition.

"It will have helped to dream all together", Franz from Sager said behind Hans. The Sagerer was just like the Oberhollenzer by profession alpine dairyman and livestock Swiss. For months the two alpine shepherds had been marching in a double row with the student and the Troger Waschtl. The Troger Waschtl was a carver by profession and knew how to cut the most beautiful pipe bowls for the company. He was therefore a much sought-after personality among the hunters and exercised a kind of guardianship over all pipe smokers in the division. For no one could for like him mend a broken pipe as cleanly as a picture and make it ready for use again, and only those who know the Tyrolean know what it means for him when a fine pipe is in order. So the double row of Bacher, Oberhollenzer, Sagerer and Troger formed a special kind of cloverleaf in the company. Already in their shape these four were very different phenomena. The Oberhollenzer tall and mighty, with a few broad Berglers shoulders, his face framed by a real Hofer beard; the Troger, on the other hand, narrow and lithe, with a blond beard and clever, constantly restlessly wandering eyes, which betrayed the "artist searching for motives"; the Sagerer, short and stocky, with strong legs that found firm support in the climbing rock and other steep ground and an eternally laughing and good-natured face; and finally the one-year-old Bacher with the somewhat helpless looking eyes that seemed

to be constantly searching for a starting point for educated thought processes in the surroundings and the otherwise well-grown, but without any special "Tyrolean teeth". He was neither ponderous nor "as light as a chamois", he had no real climber's calluses and also no machine gun hump on which, apart from the light M.G., everything could be unloaded that the veteran hunters would have liked to hang on a cabin's wall. But so the Oberhollenzer had to carry the climbing rope and the crampons, and the Troger had to relieve himself with the Sagerer in carrying the snow irons and ice axes. If the double row marched in fours according to the drill regulations, it resembled an organ pipe. The Oberhollenzer was number one and their little moving base, but the one-year-old Bacher, as number four, had to move the more. At the moment, however, they too marched in single file, like the whole company, quietly and introspectively, through the "mountain night"...

Avalanches!

The column has been climbing higher and higher up an increasingly steeper mountain slope. For some time now, even the last oncoming line of soldiers has failed to appear. Only a short distance and then one had to have reached the ridge, where the last to the shelters. Lieutenant von Tannhuber lets us stop for a moment. The hunters leaned against the snowy slope, spread their legs in the deep snow holes they had tread out with their footsteps and slapped their hands against the shoulders to warm up a little. It's freezing cold up here at altitude. While in the valley below there was no wind at all, it's howling like there's a giant storm here. In a few moments, the individual figures of the resting people are covered by a fine layer of ice.

"My God, it's burning like a thousand fine needles" Troger curses and runs his sleeve over his face.

"A poor devil can't smoke a pipe any more", the Oberhollenzer also curses and knocks out the nest of his pipe ashes on the gun stock.

"Look up" the Sagerer says to Hans and pushes him. With his right hand he points to the area below the slope where they are standing. There, in the light of the winter night, lie the traces of avalanches, crumbling lumps of snow, white balls several meters high, with small snow particles in between," like thick, flaky potato flour. Dark, broken tree trunks, crumpled wood, broken wooden walls of crumbling barracks, splintered, cracked, shattered, smashed, protruding there, all an eerie picture of devastation. And "in the middle of it all, even here at night, clearly recognizable from the white surroundings, shovel pieces, broken skis, a piece of coat, a human leg, still dressed in puttees and shoes, probably thrown far away by the being that once wore it, and which somewhere below is sleeping its last sleep. «

None of the soldiers is in the mood to lose a lot of words under the impression of what they have seen. Every one of them knows the white death, and everyone fears it. Therefore it seems like a release when the command of the lieutenant to march on sounds. Again the column continues to work its way through the snow and storm up here. And yet it seems as if eerie forces were trying to push the column away from this place of horror more quickly.

Suddenly, there is a deadlock at the front, where the lieutenant at the top is the first to leave. An order is given:

"Danger of avalanches, reduce distances."

So there's still danger after all, the hunters think, and look along the slope. After a short break, the race continues.

Oberjager Plangger, who is the last to march, can already see the entrances to the shelters over there at the ridge end with the naked eye.

Then -- suddenly there is a whistling sound in the air. Dull thunder shoots through the track, roaring along the slope, howling, whistling past the heads of the suddenly crouching soldiers and releasing the whole wide wall of snow like a roof tile from the fabric of the landscape.

A voice still roars: "Get down!"

Then it roars by, passes by, pulls, tears, throws, chases, and blows everything around it and with it, until after a whole great eternity it slowly reverberates and thunders somewhere in the depths. Fine, white snow dust remains above the slope. Like wafts of mist, it drifts over the high for a few minutes. For a moment everything is quiet, dead silent.

Finally, life comes back to the white snow. Snorting, shaking, cursing, stomping around, digging with their hands, the people dig themselves out of the white clutches that hold them captive. Comrades seek comrades, shouts are heard. Those at the top of the shelters have apparently watched the disaster and are now coming down the slope with shovels and picks, ropes and poles and sliding down the slope to bring help and look for the buried victims. The first one to free himself completely and get back on his feet first is the first lieutenant. The avalanche had not been able to do much to him, because

he had already been beyond its breaking point and had only been torn down by the air pressure. Stretched out, the echo of his collection call to his comrades breaks out in the rock faces. Name-by-name he calls out into the night. But only rarely does the usual answer: "Here!" reach him. The white death has once again yielded a bitter harvest. What is still alive is fighting its way out of the snow and trying to bring help to those still buried. After a long struggle, Tannhuber finally has enough people together to give him an idea of the magnitude of the disaster. Eight men are completely missing. Several others are still lying whimpering in the snow with broken limbs. Half of the people's equipment has gone to hell. Nothing else helps but to wait for the rescue teams to come out of their positions and to give first aid to the injured. But if there's one of the first to get back on his feet, apart from the first lieutenant, that's the intelligent one, and at this moment his first thought is really only for his comrades from the double row. Thank God, all three of them are alive and are busy working their way up out of the snow.

"My pipe, damn it, my pipe is gone," hums the Oberhollenzer incessantly, searching in the snow in vain for his lost pipe.

"That's clearly more important than if you had gone" laughs the Troger, who seems to have overcome the shock, and then says "Come on, I'll carve you a new one!"

"Have you got all the guns?" asks the intellectual in between and picks up the rifle that is covered with snow.

"The Bacher is always the most clever," laughs the Troger.

"Whether we're still alive, he doesn't ask, but whether we've still got the guns, he was probably already thinking about in the snow!"



Battle for the Fieldguard

The detached company of Kaiserjager, which had occupied the Col di Lana for eight days, will have to wait until the evening to leave.

"He shoots down our people in daylight like the snow hare", the hunters say to the new arrivals, "he" being the Italian alpine hunters, the Alpini, who have posted their field guards in the meter-deep snow just below the summit of the Col di Lana, and who have laid the ridge path leading from the Col di Lana to Monte Sief under sniper fire. » -

But otherwise they are strangely quiet, the people from Wallis," they say of the previous summit crew, but then again. "The devil knows what they're up to. They're preparing something over there, but we don't know what!"

The new arrivals prick up their ears and listen out into the mountain wilt. But nothing stirs. Every now and then a shot is fired that echoes a hundred times, but otherwise there has been a strange silence over this front of over two thousand meters for days. Then the new arrivals are also so worn down by the gruesome avalanche experience of the night. Tired, they squat in the snow shelters and the caves, the ice caverns, which were blasted into the rock. They are waiting for the relieved ones to leave with the nightfall and to "take their places".

Only the intellectual does not sleep or doze. His otherwise always astonished eyes have suddenly become very serious and thoughtful. The teasing and the good-natured shouting of the comrades from the double row remains also without any effect. Yes, Bacher has known more than they all suspect for

hours. After he had put his things down in the shelter on the rock face under the wooden stairs leading up to the field waxing position, he had gone to the first lieutenant. All the officers -- including those of the outgoing company -- and the "Oberjaga" Plangger, the mother of the company, had gathered in the officers' cavern. The First Lieutenant had briefly thanked him on his respects and addressed him:

"Hansl, you are the youngest one-year-old and at the same time the youngest Kaiserjager of the company, but especially as a one-year-old I expect you to perform the task you will receive from me very well. What I am about to say to you is for the time being only for you. You must not say a word of this to the other comrades.

"The enemy is trying to undermine our position and wants to blow up the whole top of the Col di Lana. Now, you know our old rock sentry over at Hill 2250, which we lost in the fall. The enemy had cleared this rock guard at the beginning of winter because the snow would have crushed his position there otherwise. If we now succeed in reoccupying this mountain pass, which lies opposite the rocky ridge on the left wing of our company, we may be able to disrupt the enemy's undermining work in Col di Lana with a machine gun positioned there. And here it is up to you. Take two or three comrades with you, because more than four men cannot take part in the whole action. Only when I have the certainty that you have succeeded in occupying the cliff, I can go into action and support your enterprise with my men. Y but above all, you must be careful of one thing. According to certain signs, the enemy seems to have been trying to put his guard back into the abandoned rock guard for several days. "It is therefore likely that you may come across an enemy patrol on your way, which in turn wants to occupy the abandoned pass. Make sure

that the Italians do not anticipate you. The enemy itself has the greatest interest in occupying the pass in order to be able to carry out its drilling work undisturbed. You must therefore outrun him. Who do you want to take with you?"

The man on the end thought for a moment and then said:
"Only the hunters Oberhollenzer, Sagerer and Troger."

"Oh, the double line", said the lieutenant and got up.

"Well, Bacher, show us what you can do and live up to your name, Intelligenzhansl. The fate of the whole company is in your hands. I can tell you nothing more. Good wishes are not in order here. I merely expect that you, as Tyrolean Imperial Hunters, know what you have to do. Ensign Bürgler will help you familiarize with the terrain. I'll order the Chief Fighter to see that no one in the company knows the purpose of your departure. For your comrades, you selves and the three other encampments you are commanded to go on patrol duty. Thank you!"

This is what the one-year-old Bacher thought of, and the faces of his comrades when they suddenly learned in the evening that they had been chosen under his leadership for such a difficult action. But he would succeed. He wanted to prove that to the company. For God's sake, - they were not allowed to be blown up! So that's why there was a strange silence over there with the Italians. They were no longer lying in wait on the mountain, but they were drilling his guts out, deep inside, in the Col di Lana! —

I wonder if they have been among them. Maybe the enemy drills were singing under them deep in the rock at that

moment, while the hunters were chatting here, having no idea what was going on?

The call of the ensign put him out of his mind.

"Bacher, come on, let's take a look at the positions from the field guard." .

"Yes, sir, ensign!"

The hunters, especially the comrades from the double row, listened for a moment as the ensign drove the one-year-old away.

"He'll probably have a special talk with him," said the Sagerer.

"They'll probably be talking about something that only students understand and about what we'll be stupid enough to do," muttered the Troger and he threw himself around, only to snore again. But then the signal whistle of the chief hunter Plangger sounded in between.

"Oberhollenzer, Sagerer, Troger!"

"Hell and devil to whom is never there! Here! We're coming!"

When all three of them returned from the Oberjager and the one-year-old Bacher also returned from his tour with the ensign, all four of them looked serious for a moment. Then, however, the old mountain cunning and the mischievous roguishness of the front soldier, who was used to danger, broke in the eyes of his comrades. They grabbed the intellectual Hansl under his arm, patted him on the shoulders so hard that

his arms threatened to jump and then wiped their noses with their field jackets' sleeves.

"We'll give 'em a run for their money. -Is that right, Hansl!"

"Yes, we will!" Hansl just smiled back and wiped himself over the nose. They were the only three guys who teased him so often!

What's going on at the Pass?

For hours the First Lieutenant von Tannhuber had been lying in the company's forward position, impatiently watching every movement that could be seen in the terrain around the old rock guard and the hill 2250 that was lost in the autumn. There was still no trace of Bacher the year-old and the others who had climbed down with Bacher to the Col di Lana position. Lieutenant von Tannhuber had almost given up on the one-year-old and his comrades. Either they had fallen down into one of the gorges while climbing out the previous night, or they had been discovered and silently put down while crossing the snow dump from the enemy position barely eleven steps away. A third possibility was also that the enemy in the end, despite the winter, had occupied the rocky outcrop immediately and had simply intercepted the patrol when they entered the rock. More and more suspicious the lieutenant looked over to the rocky outcrop. For God's sake!

Of course, something was crawling over there on the band that ran across the rock face! If it was the Alpini, then good night, good comrades. But what did he mean by "good"? The Bacher, this intellectual was just a good-for-nothing. If someone else had led the patrol, the action might have been successful after

all. Annoyed, the lieutenant took the field glass to help. Of course, that's where the mess was! The glass confirmed his suspicions. So the Italians had crawled through the snow field before Bacher's men, had managed to get in there unnoticed by the patrol and there were some of them crawling straight out of all fours, guns dangling from their necks, through the cliff, from where they could get into their firing positions and into the wildly torn rock nests at the top. There couldn't have been enough.

Tannhuber was counting. One, two, -- - four, -- seven. Seven men were there. But they were carrying something. They dragged machine gun parts with them on ropes. But if the Italian patrol could only get the machine gun in position, then any protective action against being blown up was futile. The Lieutenant tore the nozzle to his cheek. Pam -- Pam -- Pam – it cracked through the silence.

Ta-pum, ta-sputw echo it back from the rocks all around. In the so-called trenches, behind the snowy boulders, above the caverns, everywhere on top of the peaks it came to life.

Bembembemembem -- taktaktaktak - it suddenly rattled out of a hole in the rocks. The machine guns sang.

Sssssss- peua fsssssf - ping - it went into the rock, splashing splinters, slate and debris that trickled down the walls as if water sprinkles were falling, and clapping back from the high walls.

The lieutenant cursed and devilled that the wild shooting was completely useless. All it took was one shot somewhere, then the concert would go on from all sides. without a single person

actually knowing where to shoot. He shouted to his hunters that they should not shoot at the enemy position in front, but that the enemy should be sought in the area of the abandoned rock position.

The phone rang. The Herr Major of the Section Command railed at what the damned Tannhuber Company could think of, so futilely to fire without any cause at a long abandoned position. The hunter Stemberger, who was operating the telephone, shouted the major's outburst of rage word for word down to the First Lieutenant on the rocky outcrop where the First Lieutenant was lying.

"Stemberger, tell him," the lieutenant returned, "that he should not let his bald head shine outside the hole in the cavern, otherwise the alpine men will spit at him, so that he will forget to shine forever!"

A few minutes later, however, Monte Sief roared from seventy names spitting death up to the rocky outcrop. But all the shooting did not help. The Italians had apparently won. With unbelievable boldness and contempt for death, they had crawled up in the fire of the Austrians and now, hidden from the snipers, they pushed themselves into the rock behind the rock walls.

No more shooting helped. The stone covered them, and in a few minutes the brave enemy chased down bullet after bullet and held the Austrians in the cavern holes like the cat in front of the mouse hole. There was only one thing to do. Throw them out again at the top. Until evening fell and a new action could be prepared, many a good hunter bit into the hard Dolomite rock of the Hennaterde. Hundreds of eyes in the low positions

now lurked excitedly and ready to aim at the moment when the Italians had finished nesting and looked ready to open fire. So hundreds of eyes were staring at friend and foe. For breathlessly as many Alpini probably looked over from the Italian main position. The bony hands of the Kaiserjager stretched around the rifle locks. High above the mountains quietly and carelessly torn cloud shreds moved. Also over there, behind the Falzarego Pass, there was a dull roar. The artilleries began their daily concert.

An hour passed.

Suddenly there was a sharp bang over at the Rock Guard. Then another one.

What happened? --

All of a sudden a figure came loose on the snowy stone ridge. There it stood, high above the abyss, for a moment. Then it reached with its hands far out into the infinite emptiness, leaping into the air as if it were jumping off into the eerie depths. A rifle smashed into a rocky outcrop, the splinters almost reaching the Austrians.

The hunters stared pale. What was going on over there? Were the Italians beating each other to death? Once again, a human body was thrown far over a ridge. Then this man also struck dull and heavy over the walls, bounced like a rubber ball against a large stone block, rolled a few meters further and finally rolled down over the snow field, where he was bled to death and shattered, a horrible nothing. Death fought over there, between the chimney and the floodplain steps to the tops. Invisible to friend and foe alike, it clawed at the fearless

soldiers and knocked their fingers away from the grips into which they had boldly and skilfully cramped themselves. Shots were again fired into the silent war field. One, two, three! Then it became silent. Death silent...

Lord, give him the eternal rest!

No sooner had the first shadows of the night fallen over the Col di Lana area, which had been fought over so much, than eerie life began to stir again in the snowy fighting positions. The macabre gait of heavy nailed shoes scratched steamily in the crunching snow of the dumps. It sneaked along the high walls, searching the rock faces, dragging here and there fine



bodies a few meters up, then let go and plummeted back into the meter-high snow with a silent curse.

Suddenly, a cone of light shattered sharply and blindingly the night that had just begun. Ghostly it drove the mountain tops out of their submergence into glaring whiteness, gliding searchingly along the white-sugar-covered rock faces and finally sinking treacherously into the area of the embattled rock. There, ten or twelve Kaiserjager ducked deep into the rock face, then, with their faces pressed into the rock, crawled under the overhanging rock outcrops, resembling only dark patches of rock in the blinding white of the headlights.

It was First Lieutenant Tannhuber himself who, together with a select group of hunters, wanted to obtain certainty about the situation in the rocky position and about the fate of Bacher's men. That is probably why the Italian over on the slopes of Monte Poré did not trust the peace. The foolhardiness of his people in the morning had probably made him nervous.

Suddenly, two or three machine gun bursts raged and crackled against the mountain. From top to bottom, from left to right. All of a sudden blood flowed in bright red streams from the open mouth of Oberjager Plangger of Tannhuber Company, who was pressed firmly against the snow, and gurgled into the ice flowers. He should never again turn his admonishing eye to the "black sheep" of the company, the Oberjager!

Quietly, without a single word to say over his dying lips, he was now rotting away in the deep snow.

Higher up, the headlights came on again. Now life came to those who were cowering. With short, sure steps they sat inside the rock and quickly clawed their way up between the walls. The first one quickly felt the grip possibilities, the next one, who climbed up close below him, held the climbing hook firmly between his teeth. One grip down with the left hand of the previous man, and the hook went up, one hand first scraped off the snow crust, then set it down on the hard rock, and immediately afterwards dull hammer blows echoed through the darkness. The Kaiserjager High Patrol hit the climbing hooks on which they wanted to get up to the rock position, which the one-year-old Bacher had set up with of his patrol and which had now been captured by the enemy. - - She had to be rushed. Tannhuber and his men must have climbed into the rocky cliffs before the searchlight could scurry down again. Moreover, a new action by the enemy was not out of the question. Before dawn, the top had to be in Austrian hands for good. The people quickly rose to their feet. Now it was time to climb even tighter into the rock face!

Deep dark night was all around. Lieutenant Tannhuber, himself a seasoned climber, crept forward. Knee thrust after knee thrust. When he extended his right hand, he reached into the void. This emptiness meant a four hundred metre drop.

Carefully feeling his way, he crawled back again.

A soft whistle between his teeth gave a signal to move backwards. As soon as Tannhuber was back at the slope, he loosened the rope he had been carrying rolled up and let it slide down to the depths.

Hurried hands deep below him grabbed it, knotted it tightly and let it slide further down. Then the first lieutenant crawled forward again.

In the middle of the band the spotlight grabbed it again. Immediately, an angry barking sounded from deadly spitting mouths. Whole sheaves of machine gun bullets were scattered around the huddled people.

If one of them now fell and broke the rope, then the one who was hit pursued: all the others with him into the depths. No sooner had the officer had this thought than the rope tensed beneath him. Now only one thing applied. Stay down and don't move. Lie down for his life. No cover. In the middle of the cliff, on the right of him the abyss, on the left the overhanging rock and in front of him 20 m to the rescue entrance to the upper canteen.

Finally the spotlight seemed to find nothing alive in the rock face. Apparently they were all dead who had crawled there. But as soon as the disgusting glare light slid down, it stirred again in the icy rock.

With desperate effort Tannhuber pulled the rope with the suspended load behind him. He only had to be able to drag it ten or twelve knee-pulls more. There the strap expanded a little. Rigidly his elbows braced themselves against the ice ridges. The bleeding right hand pushed around tentatively, jerking the rope searchingly and pulling it tight. With a muffled voice he called the second man, who climbed behind him, the Jager Huber.

No answer. Once again, the lieutenant shuddered at the climbing party. What was going on behind him? Was there nobody behind him? Or -- - had he been hit?

"Hello?" again nothing moved.

Finally a voice came up. It was the third hunter who crawled behind the first lieutenant. With a subdued voice he shouted: "Herr Lieutenant, Huber is dead. — "I can see how the bullet caught his whole face."

Then the lieutenant bit his lips. They couldn't let the dead man hang by a rope between them. His weight was fatal to them when they climbed up the rope and entered the upper funnel. There was only one way -- cut it loose - and throw it off! The crawling Kaiserjager would not have been able to get past the corpse to do so. the harness is much too narrow. The lieutenant closed both eyes for a moment. Then his body tightened.

Hard and heavy the wounded right hand reached over his back. At the spot where the officer's bayonet had been pushed onto his back for the sake of climbing, underneath the rucksack, the hand clenched itself tightly and decisively around the handle of the sidearm, pulled the sharp steel with a Jerk out of the sheath and held the blade close to the fibers of the rope.

"All-you ready to cut the rope?"

"Yes," it came back. --

A hair-sharp cut - and the rope remained loose. The first lieutenant crawled on. Then he listened for a moment. A muffled sound penetrated his ear -- then a few moments later there was a heavy impact deep below. -

"Lord, grant him eternal rest.

How the one-year-old Bacher talks to the Italians

Tannhuber had to continue. Forward to the upper entrance. There was a dead body. It was an Italian.

"Strange," thought the officer. "Who else here has got something against the Italians..."

"Stop, or I'll shoot!"

"Well, hell, yeah, - are you the ones up there?"

"Herr Oberleutnant," it came back eagerly. .

"Bacher, it's you," first lieutenant Tannhuber pointed out with the greatest surprise.

"Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant, it's all of us!"

"Yes, and the Italians?"

"They're here too, Lieutenant!"

"They're also here?"

A few minutes later, when the first lieutenant crawled with his patrol into the rock face, he was presented with a strange sight."

In front of the only shelter, which stood out in the form of a cave-like depression from the white of the meter-high snow walls within the rocky position, the Oberhollenzer and the Sagerer cantered with guns ready to fire. And behind them, in the darkness, the figures of three disarmed Italians became visible, who, as prisoners of the Bacher patrol, were held squatting in the emergency cavern.

In the meantime, the one-year-old and the jager Troger made their report to the first lieutenant.

"Just as we are about to climb up, Herr Oberleutnant, the Troger and I, we notice that some are climbing in the chimney in front of us. Hell, we thought, it's got to be Italians who beat us to it. At first we were a little behind, because they could not recognize us in the darkness, and advised us quietly.

The situation for us was damned unpleasant. Because: either a whole Italian patrol climbed in front of us, and then the possibility for us to throw them out at the top was excluded, and we could only try to get back to crawl back our position -- or the Alpini in front of us were the leading group of a larger Italian detachment, which soon had to follow their comrades in order to capture the rock guard again properly and to secure our position, and there we would be in the middle between the Italians in the climb."

"Yes, and that's where Hansl had a really clever thought, Herr Oberleutnant," the Troger said to the one-year-old and now continued to report:

"Oberhollenzer und Sagerer" he said, "You stay here and cover our backs in the fireplace here -- if any of them come after us, you just throw them down the rock. The Troger and I, we just climb after the Italians in the meantime.

If we can deal with them up there alone, we'll get you up here. If we don't make it, you'll see our bodies anyway, which will then probably tumble down somewhere. Then you'll have to see for yourself how you get back into the Austrian Position."

"A damn simple logic," he remarked the Lieutenant in between, - "If the enemy doesn't fall off the mountain, we have to do it ourselves. Boys, you're already... guys... --- You're great guys, but move on".

"Then, yes, Herr Oberleutnant, the Troger and I just followed on, and they must have thought that we were just before the enemy, that it is they who will follow, because in the darkness they even let us use their ropes with a rope ladder, so that we could climb further up!"

"They let you use their ropes?"

- "Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant. I still know Italian quite well from my grammar school lessons ... then I was often in Trentino during the holidays and I simply called them up in Italian and told them to let us hang the ropes and tell us the way to go on."

"And when you two got to the top, didn't they just disarm you? You couldn't even crawl up the rock face on your own ...to put up a fight?" «

"They were so taken aback, Lieutenant, that I knocked the first one over when I jumped over that little snow ridge."

"And then they must have thought that we are many, Herr Oberleutnant," the Troger again said. "In any case, we caught the three of them in there like nothing!"

"You two all alone?"

"Yes, as it turned out tomorrow, the men over there missed the agreed signal and therefore sent a second patrol after them."

"Ah-, so the crashing figures we saw over there this morning were the poor devils that got into your hands!"

"Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant. We just have to find other ways out than throwing them," the Oberhollenzer reported trustingly.

"Like the second Italian patrol, who saw the top row of their men take off, they just turned around and went back!"

"When we saw that there was no more danger, we just climbed up and kept them company until the night came. Just as I wanted to get back to you with the report, Lieutenant, the shooting started again. So we thought: if they are ours, who are being shot at by the Wallis, that's good. Reinforcements will come anyway. But if it's the Alpini who come, there is every man necessary for defence."

"And with the prisoners, what would you have done with them if the Italians had come looking for us?"

"Oh," said the one-year-old again, "they wouldn't have moved. We played cards with them during the day -- it was quite funny

-- the ones in Italian and we in German --. But I left anyway. They always won."

"So you remained two against three?"

"Two of us were always on guard and two of us entertained the Italians in between," the Troger added. "All we had to do was find a common ground"

"Why?"

"About the money. They did not want to take our Austrian crowns in payment and we did not want their shabby paper lire, Lieutenant!"

At that moment there was a muffled, thunder-like bang over behind Monte Poré. For a second, the hunters listened out into the night. The three Italian prisoners also listened intently for a moment, almost lurking. Then the lieutenant convulsively clasped his nozzle. "My God," he thought, "My God, if the comrades who came out here with me now realize that this is not the firing of a gun, but ..." .

"Herr Oberleutnant, what's that?" was the quietly spoken question of a young Kaiserjager who was with the patrol. .

The muffled bang was still lost in an eerie, underground roll. The whole mountain face still trembled, as if shaken by an invisible force and rattled away. Then the muffled rumble was lost in an ever-weakening shock of shocks.

The soldiers still listened breathlessly.

Suddenly he said, "That wasn't a gun blast!"

"Bullshit," the one-year-old's voice intervened. "You heard wrong, Jager Pfitzner!"

The jager mocked him, "Nothing has hardened my life, I'm a one-year-old, I'm an intellectual, but I'm smart. I wasn't a road builder for years, I didn't see the Dolomite road being built. That there, that's a blast in the mountain, they're drilling for our position over at Col di Lana!"

It was the truth. The hunters from Bacher's patrol were silent. They knew about it -- but the others. . .

"So what? ..." the lieutenant drove around.

- "So what, Pfitzner, do you have any other comments to make?" The officer's question sounded almost threatening.

"Yes, otherwise... no... or else I would have said it, Lieutenant!"

"So now you know, that's to say you and the comrades who have just come out of here with me, - because Bacher and his three comrades already knew it, - that we can now not only fall from a shell, a grenade or a mine every hour over there, but that we can be blown up at any time!"

"Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant!"

"Well, then a leader and six men, of those who came out with me, now take the patrol Bacher up there. The rest of us are going back to our positions at the top of the Col di Lana!"

"Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant", it sounded back in the choir. Not a single voice, not a single tone of voice, not a single undertone left any doubt that from now on all these men were ready to be blown up rather than surrender the icy, rocky ground at Col di Lana to the enemy without a fight.

At the Front with Comrade Death



With such actions, day after day came the first half of April of the winter campaign 1915X16. While the winter still kept the fighting positions frozen in a snow and ice cover of several

meters, the terrible final battle had begun up at the Col di Lana itself, underground in the rock. The second regiment of the Tyrolean Kaiserjager still lay up there in the positions. While the first regiment fought in the neighbouring tofana area of the Dolomites west of Cortina d'Ampezzo, and the third and fourth regiment occupied the high positions in the Lagazuoi section and at the Pordojoch and near Fedaja, it remained reserved for a part of the Bolzano, i.e. the South Tyrolean house regiment, the certain death of being blown up into the air, to persevere on the Col di Lana. To prepare a counter-blast or even to drive counter-mine tunnels was impossible in the short time. So without having sufficient technical means of their own to defend themselves against the blasting that would have proved necessary, these Kaiserjager had to watch how the enemy undermined their own position at the summit more and more by digging his blasting tunnel. Soon after the news of the Italians' intention to blow up the Tyroleans by means of mines, because they could not be driven off the mountain top with their weapons, had become generally known among the Austrian troops themselves, the section commander had ordered a twenty-four-hour relief of the soldiers on the summit. Never did the company relieving them in the evening know whether it was not they who blew up. Heroism, which did not know many words, inspired this fighter on the Col di Lana, whom death had already marked. Without a single word of grumbling, without any depressed expressions, with the quiet and modest matter-of-factness of the German-Austrian front-line soldier the hunters of this Tyrolean regiment went back every evening to the positions on the mountain. No sooner did they speak of the lot that awaited them all. And even when they did, it was in the form of a good-natured remark, a joke, or a figure of speech that never betrayed any fear or cowardly recoil from the certainty of certain death.

Time and again the self-evident truth sounded from the speeches of these men, who described the conscious expectation of death not as an act of fate, but as a necessary act for the freedom of their mountain homeland.

Night after night, the eerily whirring sound of the Italian drilling machines deep inside the rock became more audible. Heavy and rumbling the mountain groaned, among the explosives in his rock, with which the Italian mines tried to accelerate their drilling work. Then suddenly the defenders drove up to their guard stands and accommodation caverns and listened to them out of the night. Who knew how long it would take? - Were there only days left, or maybe hours? - But there it was again, the rumbling and rolling, the buzzing and scraping... and as long as it lasted, as long as there were possibilities of living on for hours and days. -- If the noise of the drills and the roar of the blasting stopped one night, death came! - Because then the enemy brought back his mines to get the man-locks with which he let the charges of explosives and the ignition cables touch, which should then finally blow up the Col di Lana.

Nevertheless he should not see the Kaiserjager die so easily, this opponent who would never have been able to ersium the top himself. The anxiety of the Italian undermining work was becoming more and more apparent day by day to the lively every one of the companies of imperial fighters who were relieving themselves, almost competing in the execution of daring patrols and patrols. The response of the Italian artillery was not lacking. But not only the Italian artillery, especially after the bold occupation of the rock guards, drummed with ever increasing force on the piece of snow-covered rock that was the summit of the Col di Lana, still rumbled by shells. No,

the enemy also set new storm waves despite the deep snow, despite the danger of avalanches and the possibility of falling. So the Jagers up there not only did go out night after night in the nerve-racking stone grinding of the bean machines, but in the last days before their heroic deaths, they also fought hour after hour, weapon in hand, for every stone, every rock and every snow wall.

The Blast

Once again such a day full of battle noise, vipers and bangs, accompanied by the heavy impact of the projectile explosions, had passed. For the umpteenth time the Tannhuber Company had replaced the Holm Company. For about an hour now the positions around the summit of the Col di Lana had been quiet. Even over on the Sief and with the Italians whose trench was eleven meters from the outermost Austrian field guard, the front seemed to have gone to sleep in the evening of April 17, 1916.

At the very front, at the Austrian post that had been pushed furthest forward, the one-year-old Bacher was on guard since the Tannhuber Company had taken over.

Above him the Sagerer squats, silent, introverted, and in the dark, incessantly shredding with his knife on a piece of wooden post which he has dug up God knows where. Behind the one-year-old, who stares out into the night and listens, the voices of the comrades, the Oberhollenzer and the Troger whisper, who are quietly in the guard below. They don't sleep, they sit at the exit of the snow hole and look over to him, who himself is keeping watch, and to the Sagerer.

He can almost feel them, the eyes of the comrades, the intellectual Hans, and hears every word they say.

"Troger, what is carving in the darkness, you can't see anything it's so shady..." the one-year-old hears the Oberhollenzer.

"For what is carved, you can't see anything. I feel you're better off dozing than seeing."

"Shut up... what's carving the wood for? Nothing..."

"For nothing and nothing at all... Oberhollenzer... you better not talk, if you don't know what it is that I carved for you, for Sagerer, for me and Hansl."

"Then what is it?"

"A grave cross!

"Well... Troger... why?"

"I don't know, but if he blows us all up anyway, the Italian, I just thought, I'll cut a cross for us four... God knows, maybe the Lord will put all four of us together in a cairn.... nothing helps at this point"

"Are you thinking of flying in the air again?" the Sagerer man grumbles. "Devil, Trough: I think you're braver than that. What's necessary is necessary... When it comes, death will come, even for us up there. But that is certainly not as fast as you mean it, Troger. Death ain't coming so fast!."

The intellectual Hans hears the speeches of his comrades and

yet he doesn't hear them. As if from far away, the soft clattering sounds up to him in the rifle range. He leans forward between the frozen sandbags and the cold snow walls of the post and stares out into the darkness. The gorge that separates the slopes of Col di Lana from those of Monte Poré is black before his eyes.

Also over at Monte Poré nothing disturbs the white of the Slopes, which extend over the lower forest tops of the mountain - How quiet the front is all of a sudden!

"Death ain't coming so fast!" Isn't that what the Sagerer had just said to the Troger? You know that for sure, Sagerer, for sure, yes?

Once again, the intellectual listens to the enemy. Even there in front, just eleven meters away, where the black sticks of the barbed-wire posts just stick out but a few centimeters from the snow, the Italian doesn't move.

A horrible thought suddenly comes to the Bacher. Has that one over there cleared his picket in front of us?

At one point the thoughts of the one-year-old are running through his head like mad.

Of course, if the rock position that he himself had occupied -- it must have been ten days ago -- had still been in his own possession, then it would have been impossible for the Italian to clear the position in front of us unnoticed. But the rock position was untenable.

After three days it had had to be cleared again because of the insane enemy drumfire. So now it was possible for the enemy to pull his men out of the front position unobserved in order to ... yes, to ...

There they lay in the darkness, the Dolomites, the home mountains, perhaps that at this moment he was seeing them for the last time ... over there Monte Peltno and to the left of it the Civetta and then to the far right the eternal ice fields of the Marmolata. For him it was time to say goodbye, yes, goodbye to the mountains, to his homeland, to his father and mother at home, down in Brier, to his little sister in the boarding school of the English Fraulein in Meram, goodbye. . . from the Comrades and farewell . . . from life. For, if no enemy guard, no sound, no life could be felt over the wire of the enemy's own hammering, then the enemy had already pulled fine men out of the dangerous zone, which could also fly into the air: Then he was ready with fine preparations and the detonation could be expected hourly.

In this case, the order was to report immediately so that the commander of the Col di Lana could order his imperial fighters to get ready, and yes, in this, his thoughts had strayed for a moment: to take up the last order -- the order to prepare for death!

"Sagerer, relieve me for a moment, please. I must... I have to see the lieutenant immediately!"

"What? You haven't been relieved yet, so I'll go back with the report."

"No, Sagerer ... not you! . . . None of you may go. I alone can only tell the first lieutenant what..."

"Don't talk mysteriously like that. Or...maybe you noticed something? Is it far? Hello Hans, tell me what's going on already!"

"In a single sentence, the comrades are all around the one-year-old, squeezing and squeezing themselves under the narrow entrance of the guard post and trying to squeeze in next to Bacher, in order to eavesdrop on the eerie silence in front of them, which gives them the certainty that the moment of the explosion must be near.

"What's going on here?"

At the sound of this voice they all drive around. —
There's the lieutenant- no one heard him coming. As if he suddenly grew up from the white ground, his tall figure lifted itself from the pale white surroundings of the ejected snow weirs. Almost silently, completely unnoticed, the officer had approached him across the narrow trench leading to the guard's shelter.

"Herr Oberleutnant... ..I obediently report, Sir, that we believe it's time.

"Soo... is there something else?"

The answer dies on the lips of the soldiers.

He, the lieutenant, has not a word for the terrible reality that will unfold before them in the next few hours.

Not a word does he say about the fact that the hour of death is now approaching at a clock's speed.

"Message back... Get everything ready", that's all Tannhuber has to say after a break, and then:

"Bacher... Let me take a look at the guardhouse."

"Yes, Herr Oberleutnant."

The lieutenant listened intently into the night. He too can't see any movement by the enemy over there. -- No trembling and no quiet whirring betray the sinister work of the enemy drills.

All hell is breaking loose!

So there is! thinks Lieutenant Tannhuber to himself and casts a brief glance up at the night sky. The sky has become imperceptibly overcast. Above the Civetta and Monte Pelmo, dark cloud walls overshadow the white snow.

The first lieutenant bends over to listen once more with great effort. Hadn't there just been a faint clang somewhere? Damn it! If the enemy in the front, forty paces away, still had his men in the trench, then a blasting that night was out of the question. He was blowing up his own men then! ---

Oberleutnant Tannhuber jumps down from the embankment.

"Two fighters immediately advance as a patrol to see if the

enemy trench crew is still there!"

A few minutes later, the Oberhollenzer and the Troger from the guard post to the front. In their white snow cloaks they become immediately unrecognizable for their own remaining comrades.

Now fearful minutes go by. They seem like an eternity. The one-year-old Bacher, standing close to the first lieutenant and trying to pay attention to every new noise in front, gradually becomes terribly tired. He defends himself with all his strength against this feeling of tiredness, but suddenly he sees himself at school and hears loud and clear the words of an old history professor who is in the process of giving him and his classmates a definition of the young Tyrolean. He clearly hears the dignified old man now say:

"When such a little Tyrolean boy lifts his snub nose over the edge of his cradle for the first time in his young life and begins his first voyage of discovery through the wide world with the big eyes of a child, which for the time being is only a wood-panelled farmhouse parlour for him, there are usually three things that immediately catch the boy's eye: The Lord God's Wave, the picture of the farm and the sock.

These three symbolic signs, which have always formed the environment of the Tyrolean people and symbolize the faith, love of the fatherland and sense of resistance of this mountain people, remain separate until the boy reaches maturity.

He learns to pray because his mother says so and the priest preaches. He loves his homeland, because he has to bring his

daily bread to it from childhood days, and because a good God provides him with an environment for his daily work.

that it puts itself hot and glowing in his heart and on his eyes when he looks at his mountains. But the third, he loves because it is in his blood." . . .

Yes, even for him, Hans, the soldier's life and love of his homeland is in his blood! Of course he had had it good, at home with his mother and father. Memories of wonderful childhood days suddenly blend into the ups and downs of the dream images that lead him from his parents' house and playground to his classmates and teachers. Then he sees himself standing in front of his father with a firmness never before known to himself, from this Consent to volunteer as war volunteers with the Kaiserjager. Half a year earlier than he would otherwise have had to. How the mother cried and the little sister had hung herself on his arm and the father had said "yes" only after much resistance. "Son," he had said, "you're not a real Tyrolean mountain boy, you've always been a mama's boy, but it's in the blood, it's in the blood of all of you!

And then he was in the midst of the Kaiserjaeger, a Tyrolean among Tyroleans, a soldier, like the others, of course, but a bit of a mocked soldier.

Suddenly he tears the slope out of his dreams. In the midst of his thoughts the well-known sound of a hammering machine gun rushes through his mind. With a jerk he is awake again and he hears the Sagerer just say to the first lieutenant:

"No, Herr Oberlentnant. Our patrol is still... not quite close to the enemy's position. You can just make out how she's

sneaking out of the Italian compound right there on the ridge."

Down in the snowy slope before the field waxing, stone splinters, rubble slate and fist-sized snow boulders are now dancing up and down eerily in the light of two enemy spotlights that cover the foreland of the Italian trench. An Italian machine gun sprays whole sheaves of enemy fire along the path that the two hunters must have taken.

"But the fire comes from over there, from Monte Poré," says the lieutenant.

"They spotted our patrol and are shooting at them from there. There's no shot from the ditch across the street, just look, Sagerer!" .

At this very moment, just as the Intelligenz-hansl is about to crawl out of the embankment again, to see where the sudden fire on their own Patrol comes, droning on over in the area of the Buchenstein.

"Beware. . .the devils lay heavy upon us!" . And before the speaker finishes pronouncing it, it already howls approaching screeching and hits the rocky ground with terrible force. "Herr Oberleutnant, come to the guardhouse," the one-year-old asks.

"If only you can go in, I'll have to see what direction those guys over there are taking.

"If they continue to occupy the Cap of the Col, then they probably want to cover up the blasting!"

Brummmbs... In the sentences that Lieutenant Tannhuber is about to utter, with renewed force, an infernal noise comes in. And now all hell seems to have been let loose, because all of a sudden the enemy's mountain batteries also start howling, barking with their peculiar bright sound, which has earned them the nickname Tschinbum among the Austrians.

A raging wave of fire from dozens of gun barrels now rages blow after blow against the top of Col di Lana.

The Sagerer and the Bacher have long since hidden under the protective porch of their position. Only the first lieutenant could not be moved to leave his observation post.

"Take cover, both of you! If I fall, you will connect with your comrades back at the guardpost." That was his short order, no one dares to disobey it.

The enemy is running. Whole shells are spewing their guns over the handful of Kaiserjaeger, who are holding out on the top of the hill in the dugouts and shelters, ready to jump into the trench immediately on command to meet the enemy's attack or to be blown up.

Always new big buzzers grow up next to the Tschinbum impacts. Howling, whistling. They chase rocks and stone blocks apart so that their debris whistles through the air in hundreds of small pieces and bangs there and there. In between they whip up the snow. It splashes high, as if whirled up by invisible snow blowers, so that the position seems to be wrapped in a white-spraying giant snow wheel. Wood, sheet metal, iron, everything flies mixed up and then crackles.

again to the crouching defenders, who crouch with clenched teeth in their snow holes and waiting, waiting. «

Suddenly, a figure rolls down the ditch embankment, falls past the lieutenant's guard post and right in front of the Intelligenzhansl, who is crouching in the shelter's door.

The Oberhollenzer!

"Herr Oberleutnant..." One-year-old pacing "Herr Oberleutnant, the Oberhollnitzer..."

The officer is already down, bends down beside the Oberhollnitzer, bleeding all over, and tries to pick him up. . .

"Sagerer, go to the post in my place... well, Oberhollenzer, what's the matter?"

The Oberhollenzer had an explosive device blow up the whole left side of his body. The shoulder blades are shredded. The wounded man is heavily wheezing. Kneeling down, he holds the bloody uniform rags over his crushed shoulder with his right hand.

"Oh, oh ..." he moans in his insane pain, "oh ... how it burns... Hansl... Herr Oberleutnant... pour me some water... ...just a little bit of water!

"Theregive me some snow, Bacher. Quick ... and then give me your first aid kit.There, Oberhollenzer---- there... it will be better right away!"

"Herr Oberleutnant", the wounded man babbles, "Herr

Oberleutnant... the Italians are leaving their position . . .and we have seen them returning through the boarding gates. They want to blow it up, Herr Oberleutnant. They want to blow it up!"

"Where's the Troger?"

"He's outside, Lieutenant... He's already ruined. Splinters tore his head off, right in front of me, as we're about to enter the guardhouse again!"

"Bacher, Bring me the sanitation workers immediately, not a word to anyone else. . . . I'll be stay here. Quick!"

The comrades in the other parts of the position look at the one-year-old in such a strange way that he calls the orderlies and gives no answers to their questions. Do they understand his silence? Surely!

As he returns with the medics to connect the Oberhollenzer, the enemy's artillery fire has increased. The whole guard post has been torn down, a cloud of smoke smelling of danger and tempting to cough lies over the shaken position. The lieutenant and the Sagerer are just digging themselves out of the rubble. They had bedded the Oberhollenzer in the shelter and are now clearing away the snow and debris that covered the heavy-weathered man when the shell hit him.

"Oberhollenzer, still alive?"

"Yes!" a faint voice comes back.

Now everyone gets ready to help Oberhollenzer up. After a few

minutes they have the wounded man on the stretcher.

"Nothing else happened, Lieutenant. Only the wound is still dirty, it's burning like hell!

"Take him back immediately," Tannhuber orders, and then the first lieutenant says:

"Farewell, Oberhollenzer!"

And the Sagerer tells him and the Bacher tells him.

"Greetings to all at home, my wife and children, Oberhollenzer, and the village, when you come home" said the Sagerer and Hansl just said:

"Just tell your mother and father that I will thank them for everything they have done for me, all my life long."

"With these words of the Inkelligenzhansl the wounded man goes up with a sudden jerk.

"Hold down the stretcher, I say!"

"What's the matter now, Oberhollenzer?"

"I won't go back, Hansl, I won't go!"

"You must be crazy, of course you will"

"I won't! But if my shoulder's torn apart and I can't catch anything to shoot with... .. I won't be brought back at this point, Hansl ...!"

"What's wrong?" the lieutenant asks in between. "Come on, kids, we've no time to lose!" «

"I'll stay with you, Lieutenant."

The wounded man's voice is suddenly firm, sure and determined.

"Oberhollenzer, lie down on the stretcher and let yourself be collared back. No one that doesn't want to seek death has lost anything!"

"Lieutenant, I won't leave my comrades. Where the Troger lies, you and the Hansl and the Sagerer and all of the company will lie there soon, I will listen to that too..."

His words fade away in the renewed crash of a grenade and in a terrible blow that throws them all into confusion.

"Back from the position - the enemy is blowing up," the Hansl hears the lieutenant's voice just roaring towards the trench position, -- then it throws him itself, as if lifted up by invisible hands, a piece in the air, - immediately afterwards it knocks him down, throws his head against a piece of stone sticking out of the snow and presses his throat together, so that he feels as if he is being strangled by some hand at the neck. But he wants to scream, he has to scream, just as the lieutenant has just done.

Good heavens, doesn't the rock under him break apart then, mother, he suddenly thinks, mother no, Your boy won't be buried here, not here, not like this, not crushed between the pieces of stone, which were Start to tremble and roll under his knees. With superhuman strength, he forces himself high and

staggers a few steps and holds on to a field phone pole, which protrudes from a small mound from the yielding Snow and stone floor.

At this moment he sees the other comrades of the company storming into the long trenches in front of him and jumping out at the shelters

"Blast!" he yelled now.

"Blast! All back!"

Then a yellow and pink flash bursts forth, breaking in the middle of the rocks, a thunder-like roll and growl.

Rumbles shake the mountain, stones break away like splinters of wood. Fountains of snow several metres high are piled up, a terrible quake and bursting lifts, as if the whole block of mountains, thousands of metres of stone, is loosening itself at its joints to collapse.

And he is... he is collapsing in on himself, too.

Real heroism

The terrible explosion echoed for miles, thousands of horrified soldiers' eyes witnessed in this first morning hour of April 18, 1916, an unheard-of heroic drama, which came to a temporary end in the crushing and blasting of the Col di Lana summit. The smoke clouds of the burning explosion gases still drift between the gaping cracks and black stone trimmers over the top of the Col di Lana, and already the noise of new battles roars over the

ruins. Where in the bursting stone masses only death and horrible devastation seem to dominate the battlefield, there are still Kaiserjager on the western summit of Col di Lana, fighting for the rubble.

The Intelligenzhansl is also there. As if by a miracle, he was not pulled down with the masses of stone when they broke apart and

slumped back into themselves: from the crumbling elevation on which he had been holding on to the telephone pole, he had jumped in one leap onto a block of stone that had stopped unchipped in the middle between the stone slabs breaking off to the left and right. There he had jumped with two other Jagers to witness the terrible spectacle.

But as soon as the mountain had calmed down and the screaming of the buried under the rubble became loud, the figures of enemy strikers appeared before them. What to do here, without weapons? They were still thinking about it, when it was already crackling sideways from the west side of the mountain into the enemy. - Were there still comrades living in the ruins? That gave new hope. . Climbing down from the stone block and hurrying in the direction of the firing had been the result of a moment. But just these moments had to become for the hurrying hours of a shocking recognition of the greatness of the sacrifice of the comrades. Nothing reminded one of the old position, no climb, no ladder, no shelter for the guards could be recognized. Everything was smashed to pieces, beaten away, suddenly sunk before the eyes of the crawling boron. Metre-high masses of rubble and scree, which had grown black and as if charred from the dirty white of the snow to the mountain surface, covered the steep high field. And then there are sad, distressing whimpers under the

stones. There they lay, the comrades. -- Maybe very close, only one meter under the stone rubble and the three of them couldn't help.

But why think about all this now. The enemy forward line over there climbed higher and higher over the rubble. Before it could reach the last defenders above, it had to be done with them. Finally they reached the shooters.

Jaegers lie there between the stone rubble, looking nothing like soldiers. Their faces sooty and burnt, their uniforms hanging down in tatters, bloody, bruised, without headgear, often with open wounds on their bodies and heads, that's how four, nine, eleven, fifteen marksmen duck in the grey of the morning and the night. The dead, the rifle in their fists, their eyes unzipped and stared at the approaching enemy, who does not even want to grant them the peace of horror of what they have just experienced, who even here, in the ebbing of his own terrible memory, wants to rush them to death.

As the one-year-old jumps here with his two companions, a few heads are lifted from the rubble. One laughs even rough and hoarse:

"Hansl is still alive! - You deserved it, you one-year-old, because if you hadn't screamed so much, the mountain would have covered me up in my sleep.

The one-year-old looks left and right. No familiar face is among the hunters lying there. Only black, grim-faced faces siierenade over to him, faces from which the whiteness of the eyes stands out strangely sharply.

Who's in charge here?" he asks-



"No one, each for himself" is the short answer that comes back.

"Well, then I'm in charge!" «

"Heh, hear the intellectual... that's your last mission anyway... have fun commanding us!"

Then after a short intermission..;

"Do you have a rifle with you?"

"No, do you have a gun?"

"Not even this, but we have hand grenades – there's no need for anything else anyway!"

No, they really don't need rifles anymore, because at that moment the Italian assaulters appear right in front of them.

"Come on, line up!" cries Hansl. A wild, determined rage gripped him. He himself is the first to jump out and throw in one of the hand grenades that a hunter has thrown at him.

Three or four detonations occur. "You shall buy your victory dearly enough!"

Then the others also jump up and throw their hand grenades. A small group of doomed men, daredevils, who have just escaped the code of chastisement, and who do not want to leave the debris to the enemy without a fight, rushes towards the enemy with unprecedented tenacity. For a moment the Italians are hesitating. Are they human beings, or are they the spirits of the dead, who suddenly appear before them like a ghost and want to attack them with their hands, even their bare hands!

No, they are not ghosts, they are Kaiserjager, who jump at them.

A very young one in front. Yes, the one who just threw the first hand grenade.

"Per Dio! How he comes at us! What's he shouting?

"Heil Tirol!"

They hear it clearly and they cower down, the infantrymen and Alpini of the King of Italy. They rush, bayonets forwards, the last Kaiserjagers holding Col di Lana.

The daredevils dodge as they approach, they jump at their opponents. A furious struggle from man to man begins. Where the Tyroleans lack weapons, their hands grab and choke and press until they freeze, hit by some kind of death steel and have to release the pressure in the bodies of their opponents. .

Thus, hunters fall after hunters from the remaining crew of the Col di Lana, the few who remained alive after the blasting. The last one to die is the one-year-old Bacher who collapses under a bayonet thrust into his throat. In his low voice and his dwindling senses he hears once again the cracking of Austrian machine guns and the rolling of salvos against the rifles of the imperial hunters.

It is the company of Captain Holm, the one over at the Graf, who is leading over from the Monte Sief.

He will take back the Col di Lana.

